

Harpswell Community Garden
2017 Annual Report



Gardens & Gardeners

18 plots were rented by 12 individuals or families this season. The average number of plots rented annually has been 17.6 over the past six years. 75% of the gardeners returned from the previous year. Some of the unrented plots were used for Common Good Garden growing, while others that lay fallow were weeded and cover-cropped.

Paul Weeden again donated a variety of plants for the communal herb garden, a much appreciated resource and space-saver for the other gardeners. He also built a third raised bed dedicated for sunflowers. An abundance of these blooming giants were grown throughout the garden, attracting bees, butterflies and many 'shutterbugs' visiting Mitchell Field.



Infrastructure

Our main focus in 2017 was improving the irrigation system. Periods of drought in past seasons caused the well to run dry, obliging gardeners and volunteers to tote water from home to keep crops alive. After obtaining grant funding we were able to have the well extended deeper into the ground, which resulted in a sufficient supply this year.

A second phase of the project involves installation of a solar-powered, pressurized system to transport water from the well to two 275-gallon storage tanks. From there it will be distributed to outlets in central locations so that gardeners may have more convenient access. Volunteer labor will be used to build a raised stand to hold the cisterns and a shed for the pressure tank; dig conduit trenches, and install a donated drip irrigation system in the Common Good Garden.

Soil Issues

Bulk purchases of organic compost in spring and fall were used to build up raised beds, fostering improved soil drainage and fertility. A fourth "hugelkultur" mound was constructed and will be ready for Common Good growing in the 2018 season.

Other Issues

Gardeners experienced a significant delay in planting due to a prolonged cold and wet spring, but mild fall weather provided the opportunity for late season growing and a substantial yield.

Damage from squirrels, chipmunks, voles and an errant porcupine increased in 2017. Havahart traps have failed to catch the culprits, so we are looking into alternative methods of protecting crops.

Grants

We were awarded the following grants in 2017:

- Harpswell Heritage Land Trust: \$4,500 for the irrigation project
- Master Gardener Development Board: \$500 for the irrigation project
- New England Grassroots Environment Fund: \$750 for a summer intern program
- Johnny's Selected Seeds: drip irrigation kit, value \$360

Community Outreach

Relationships continue to be built with community organizations and individuals. The Harpswell Heritage Land Trust's Nature Day Camp used the garden area twice during the summer as their daily base. In June we hosted an Open Garden for visitors attending the town's "Tailgate & Recreate Day" at Mitchell Field.

Meals at Harpswell Aging at Home's "Lunch With Friends" included vegetables harvested at the Common Good Garden. **Produce** also was delivered monthly from June through November to MCHPP's Food Mobile at the Harpswell town office, and to their food bank in Brunswick on a weekly basis.

Several fruit trees are grown at HCG including local heirloom apple varieties. Young trees are also available for sale through the Harpswell Heritage Apples organization. Co-founder Robert McIntyre, a longtime plot holder, offers grafting workshops each season and provides advice on the protection and care of existing trees.

Volunteer Efforts

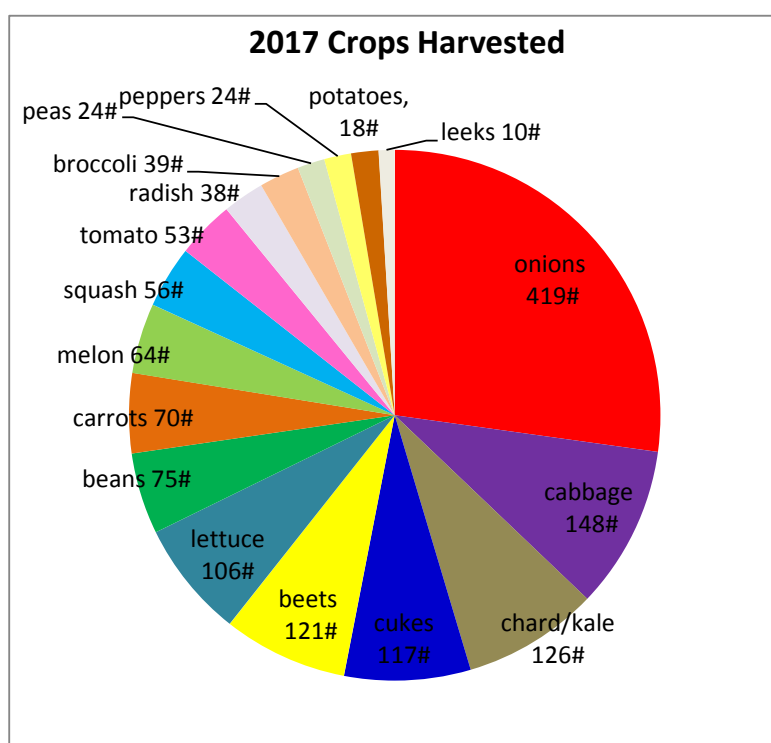
555 volunteer hours were spent improving and maintaining common areas and the Common Good Garden. Plot holders, committee members and other friends of the Community Garden showed up on Work Days held in spring and fall to restore pathways, weed fallow plots, spread compost and build up hugels. Mary Ruchinskas managed every aspect of the Common Good Garden from seed-starting through final harvest. Our master mower Bob Dehetre kept the grassy areas shipshape throughout the season, and Peg and Don Newberg gleaned and transported produce for the monthly Food Mobiles. 14 young Apogee Adventures campers and their counselors lent an enthusiastic hand in July, and seven Bowdoin students pitched in on the College's annual Common Good Day in September.



Gardening for the Common Good Project

The year got off to a very wet start which was helpful for spring crops like lettuce and onions. Production in the Common Good Garden increased for the third straight year, with a total harvest of 1,506 pounds (up by 11% from 2016).

One of our goals this year was to have more of our produce benefit Harpswell residents. We are pleased to have achieved that with 671 pounds of fresh organic vegetables going directly to six monthly Food Mobiles at Harpswell Town Office, and to three “Lunch with Friends” events sponsored by Harpswell Aging at Home. This was an almost 50% increase over last year. The remainder went to the Mid Coast Hunger Prevention Program food bank in Brunswick. Toward the end of this season we started a collaboration with Merrymeeting Gleaners, which we hope to expand next year.



While the amount of food grown has steadily increased, the limit has been reached for what we can produce with inefficient and labor-intensive hand watering. Progress has been made by having the well dug deeper and laying the groundwork for centrally-located water storage and distribution. Because there is no electricity available at this location, it will be powered by solar energy.

A drip irrigation system that is needed to sustain the Common Good Garden is planned for installation in the 2018 season.

Internship Program

Grant funding provided the means to continue the summer internship program for the third year in a row. Lauren Lemieux, a Harpswell resident and Mt Ararat High School student, returned for her second season year as our student intern. Supervised by committee member Jane Covey, Lauren helped maintain and harvest Common Good Garden produce grown for both the MCHPP Brunswick and Harpswell food bank programs.



Communications

HCG's Facebook page has steadily acquired more followers while serving as a vehicle to keep both gardeners and the public informed. An article about the Common Good Garden was featured in the October issue of the Harpswell Anchor, and information about the HCG was on display at the Harpswell Town Meeting in March.

Brochures and posters were again distributed by committee members to stores, libraries, restaurants, and other locations around Harpswell and Brunswick. They are also available year-round in a weatherproof literature holder mounted on the garden entrance gate.



2017 Goals Accomplished

Attract more gardeners. The retention rate of plot holders has risen as improvements like a reliable water supply continue to be made at the garden. In a survey conducted of those who chose not to return, we found the primary reasons were lack of time and relocation. Distance doesn't appear to be a factor, as half of the 2017 gardeners lived from 6 to 13.5 miles away. We will continue our communications plan of action to make information available to Harpswell residents and beyond.



Improve water availability. Funding was obtained to have the well dug deeper, resulting in increased capacity. Materials and equipment have been ordered and plans drawn for implementation of a pressurized irrigation system powered by solar energy in Spring 2018.

Recruit Volunteers. We were fortunate to have committee members, plot holders and residents of the local community who were willing to help out when needed. It still remains difficult to attract volunteers during the summer when people are especially busy.

Further Develop 'Gardening for the Common Good' Project. The amount of produce grown and donated to food programs increased for the third straight year. A student intern was hired thanks to grant funding. A drip irrigation system is scheduled to be in place in the upcoming season.

Community Support

The Harpswell Community Garden appreciates the contributions of individuals and organizations during the 2017 season. Following is a partial listing of groups and individuals who volunteered time and labor:

Bowdoin College students
Dave Brown
David Chipman
Jane Covey
Philip Conner
Joan and Bob Dehetre
Lance Demond
Kara Douglas
Spike Haible
Nadia and Ed Harris
Leslie Klein
Lauren Lemieux

Peter Lieberwirth
Michael McCabe
Robert McIntyre
Don Miskill
Peg and Don Newburg
Jamie Pacheco
Dorothy Rosenberg
Mary Ruchinskaskas
Judith and Michael Stanton
Susan Stemper
Paul Weeden and family
Nate Wildes

Businesses and organizations who donated materials, services and funds:

Agren Appliance
Apogee Adventures
Bart Flanagan Tree Service
Brooks Farm and Feed
C L Powers Jr Excavation
GreenSun, LLC
Harpswell Garden Club
Harpswell Heritage Land Trust
Johnny's Selected Seeds

Lowe's Home Improvement
Master Gardeners Development Board,
UMaine Cooperative Extension
New England Grassroots Environment Fund
Revision Energy
Skillins Greenhouses
Temple Well Drilling
Vail Tree Service



Harpswell Community Garden Committee

Cyndy Bush
Jane Covey
Peg Newberg
Jamie Pacheco
Mary Ruchinskaskas
Susan Stemper